



Summary Report of an International Conference entitled “Towards an African Conflict Prevention Strategy”

**UNECA, Conference Room 3, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
March 9-10, 2009**

The Conference was co-hosted by the Conflict Prevention Program of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Addis Ababa and Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) based in Milan, Italy. The overarching objective of the conference was to examine various initiatives put in place by the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to enhance their conflict prevention strategies. In doing so, the conference was geared to stimulate debates and contribute to the operationalisation of the evolving African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

Summary of Presentations

I. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework

In this Session, Commandant Abdourahmane Dieng, Director of Regional Security from ECOWAS Commission, presented on the **ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework**. Com. Dieng noted that recently the regional community made the issue of peace and security its primary concern. This resulted from the belief that without addressing the region's peace and security challenges, integration will be unthinkable. He also mentioned that taking the ECOWAS framework as an example there is a need to contextualize the Conflict Prevention approaches, so that it will be applicable in all African states.

II. Structural Prevention

During this session, presenters focussed on the various structural aspects of conflict prevention. In this session three presentations were delivered:

The first presenter, Prof. Gianpaolo Calchi-Novati, an Associate Senior Research Fellow from ISPI, delivered his presentation entitled **“Recomposition of Politics and Society after Strife and Disruption.”** In his presentation, Mr. Calchi-Novati identified weak institutional foundations of African states, state fragility and power structures as some of

the structural sources of conflicts. He noted that the nature of wars and motivations thereof, have changed, as are the needs of the political elites. He further identified the institutions of post-colonial African states as traditional (indigenous) institutions and modern (westernized) institutions. He emphasized on the need to marry these two institutions, and but there inherent challenges to accomplish that.

The second presenter, Mr. Kenneth Mpyisi, Director of ISS Addis Ababa Office, gave a presentation entitled **“Disarmament and Peace Education, Cross-Border Challenges.”** In the background of his presentation, Mr. Mpyisi explained about the major factors facilitating weapons and arms flow and also pointed out challenges to the disarmament processes. He also examined the various models and approaches aimed at developing and implementing a coordinated regional action towards an effective disarmament and peace education. He noted the need for development of new cross-border educational curriculum in primary schools in order to facilitate culture of peace among new generations across borders; real development initiatives in order to develop the marginalized areas along the borders; and also for conflict resolution initiatives within communities and across communities aimed at establishing a conducive peace environment. Mr. Mpyisi then emphasized that conflict in any one member state of a sub-region must be dealt with through integral programs for post conflict reconstruction and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration that are seen as activities influencing the whole region and not just the affected state.

The third presenter, Mr. Desire Assogbavi, from Oxfam AU Liaison Office, made his presentation on **“Civil Society and Early Warning.”** In his presentation, Mr. Assogbavi talked about the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) in conflict early warning systems. He argued that since CSOs work at grassroots level and closer to the people and existing problems, they can detect potential threats to peace and stability at the early stage. This fact gives them comparative advantage as key actors in conflict prevention processes. However, he also showed concerns that isolations by governments, lack of capacity resulting from the mandate of the CSOs and inability to cover larger areas, in terms of geography, could hinder the CSOs effective performance.

III. Operational Prevention

In this session, the various operational aspects of conflict prevention were assessed. Four presentations were made:

The first presenter, Mr. Berouk Mesfin, a Senior Researcher at the Conflict Prevention Programme (CPP) (ISS), made his presentation on **“Operational Prevention: intelligence and indicators, early warning, deterrents.”** Mr. Mesfin began his presentation by defining the terms, intelligence and early warning, as part of the operational prevention aspect as well as their contribution towards the process of conflict prevention. According to him, intelligence is the most perfect Early Warning tool to conflict and protect national interest. He also pointed that the role of intelligence services should include serving as the eyes and ears of the state --- tasked with providing threats analysis in areas relevant to national security. Mr. Mesfin also identified the two types of

intelligence, external and internal, and the discussed the standards of intelligence such as completeness, timelines and accuracy amongst others. He further outlined the cycles and elements of intelligence.

The second presenter, Ambassador Hiruy Amanuel, Programme Head of the IGAD Capacity Building Program Against Terrorism (ICPAT), made a presentation on **“Counter terrorism as a Conflict preventive Tool: The Experience of IGAD.”** Ambassador Hiruy began his presentation by giving a brief overview of IGAD—an intergovernmental body created in 1996 to supersede the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) which was founded in 1986. He explained that it was argued that there is a need to develop the organization beyond drought and Desertification. Ambassador Hiruy also noted that although since 1993 IGAD started to intervene in Somalia and Sudan, the Authority could not play a prominent role in the Ethio-Eritrean conflict. He further pointed out that now IGAD is developing its peace and security strategy to engage with the new regional dynamics and security challenges. Some of the region’s burning political issues outlined during the presentation included: Somalia, Sudan and Ethio-Eritrea conflict and at a lesser extent Northern Uganda, Djibouti-Eritrea, pastoralist conflicts, and resource based ethnic conflicts. He then also gave an overview of the ICPAT’s counter- terrorism program, the attitude behind the establishment and approach of the program. Accordingly, he noted that ICPAT is guided by the interest of the region and it has five components such as enhancing judicial measures, optimize interdepartmental cooperation, enhance border control, training and sharing best practices and management and collaboration. Ambassador Hiruy concluded his presentation by identifying the actions, outputs and outcomes of the program.

The third presenter of the second session, Mr. Aldo Ajello, UN Assistant Secretary General (1992-1995) and EU Special Representative in the Great Lakes Region (1995-2007), made his presentation on **“Enforcement and Prevention.”** Mr. Ajello shed some light on the operational enforcements with regard to the prevention of conflicts. Accordingly, he noted that there is lack of political will to really face the problem of conflict both by the international community and African governments. For him, very little is done by international community including UN, AU and EU to tame conflicts in the continent. In fact the international community seems to be prepared to spend large amount of financial resources to face the devastating effects arising from conflicts, but very little is made to prevent them. The presentation also focused on the will of the political leaders. He argued that political leaders are more reactive than proactive, more prepared to address the effects of crisis than the root causes. In addition, they are interested in short term projects that can be concluded within their mandate and that can have a positive influence on their re-elections. The other point that Mr Ajello dealt with is the issue of peace enforcement. Accordingly, early 1990s failures in Angola, Rwanda and Somalia have made the UN Secretariat to conclude that the global body is unable to manage African crisis. As a result two politically correct concepts were evacuated that were African Ownership and African solution to African problems. He argued that these are just rhetoric and the reality was that the international community wanted to get rid of the African crisis and transfer the burden of managing the crisis to the African institutions.

The fourth presenter, Ambassador Guillaume Nseke, from OIF, delivered a presentation on **“Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development as a Conflict Prevention Tool.”** Amb. Nseke started by recalling and making an assessment of the reconstruction process of World War II, Kosovo, Gaza and other conflicts occurred in Africa. The presenter also emphasized the contribution of post-conflict reconstruction to conflict prevention efforts. It is also pointed that, NEPAD has developed three phases on post-conflict reconstruction and development such as the phase of post-conflict reconstruction which will last from 1 to 2 years, the transitional phase which also take 2-3 years and the sustainable development stage which will be up to 10 years. Amb. Nseke also argued that the post-conflict reconstruction and development in Africa needs different and multitude of approaches. He also noted that nothing has changed with regard to the system, so there is a need to adopt a multifaceted approach of post-conflict reconstruction systems such as security aspect, political transition, governance, the economic, the social aspect, the institutional and the participation of citizens.

Review of Presentations

In this session, Francesco Bastagli, Senior Advisor at ISPI and former UN Assistant Secretary General (2002-2006) made a presentation on **“A reality Check on Conflict Prevention: plans, means and realities.”** Mr. Bastagli began by noting that policymakers and academicians are very doubtful about the systems and mechanisms of conflict prevention. He suggested that the reason for such doubt emanate from the complexity of conflict prevention and its daunting task. He also added that there is a problem of practicability in conflict prevention. He raised several questions: whether there is enough time to reverse circumstances (conflict triggers) before a conflict erupts? How to move from political response to conflict prevention? How to avoid one size fits all approach of conflict prevention? Mr. Bastagli then argued that any single issue that might be identified come up with the variety of complex and challenging means of handling it. For him, in practice, there is a need to break down very complex and interrelated issues into small, separate and manageable way.

Recommendations

Finally, in a plenary discussion, several recommendations were identified:

- The need to harmonise standards of conflict prevention approaches
- The need to stress on best practices of conflict prevention
- The need to enhance effective partnership with Pan-African Parliament, RECs, Civil Society Organizations and the private sector
- The need to have a strong political will for effective conflict prevention
- The need to promote the culture of peace in communities and institutions
- Creating greater synergy between the AU, RECs and CSOs
- The need to deepen electoral laws
- The need to build greater synergy and strengthen the partnership among the RECs and the AU, and also amongst the RECs themselves.